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ABSTRACT

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), as Joint Lead Agencies, have prepared a Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) to determine the potential environmental, social, and economic impacts of the proposed U.S. Highway 181 (US 181) Improvements from Beach Avenue to Morgan Avenue at the Crosstown Expressway (alternately known as State Highway 286). The proposed US 181 Harbor Bridge Project would involve the replacement of the Harbor Bridge and the reconstruction of portions of US 181, Interstate Highway 37 (I-37) and the Crosstown Expressway in Corpus Christi, Texas. The project limits extend both north-south along US 181 and the Crosstown Expressway and east-west along I-37 and include: US 181 at Beach Avenue on the north; Crosstown Expressway at Morgan Avenue on the south; I-37 and Up River Road on the west; and I-37 and Shoreline Boulevard on the east. The proposed project is listed in the Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Organization's (MPO) Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) 2010-2035, and the 2013-2016 Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

The need for the proposed project has been identified from underlying transportation deficiencies with the Harbor Bridge and US 181 in the project area, which include maintaining the long-term operation of a US 181 crossing of the Corpus Christi Ship Channel and safety risks caused by design deficiencies. The purpose of the proposed project is to maximize the long-term highway operability of the US 181 crossing of the Corpus Christi Ship Channel and to improve safety for the traveling public, including during hurricane evacuations.

Four reasonable build alternatives and the No Build Alternative were evaluated to an equal level of detail in the Draft EIS, and each of the four reasonable build alternatives would involve the following: the acquisition of new right of way; residential and commercial displacements; community impacts, including disproportionately high and adverse impacts to minority and low-income communities; access changes; conversion of existing land use to transportation use; impacts to floodplains, wetlands and other waters of the U.S., public parks and public wildlife refuge lands, historic sites, vegetation and protected species; hazardous materials; and traffic noise impacts. All of the proposed build alternatives would require the removal of the Harbor Bridge System—the Harbor Bridge and six other historic highway bridges—an adverse effect to resources eligible for the National Register of Historic Places; therefore, the proposed project would require a Section 4(f) approval by FHWA as well as a Section 404 Individual Permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and a Bridge Permit from the U.S. Coast Guard. The Red Alternative was identified in the Draft EIS as the Preferred Alternative (reclassified for the Final EIS as the Recommended Alternative). The estimated total project cost for the Recommended Alternative is \$1,071,422,202 and federal, state, and local funding would be utilized. Subsequent to the Public Hearing, and pursuant to 23 USC §139(f)(4)(D), the Joint Lead Agencies developed the Recommended Alternative to a higher level of detail to facilitate the development of mitigation measures and to comply with other federal agency requirements, such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers requirements under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and the U.S. Coast Guard requirements under the General Bridge Act. The Joint Lead Agencies have determined, in accordance with 23 USC §139(f)(4)(D), that the development of the Recommended Alternative to a higher level of detail will not prevent them from making an impartial decision as to whether to accept another alternative. The final decision on a Selected Alternative would occur when a Record of Decision (ROD) is issued. FHWA will issue a separate ROD document pursuant to Pub. L. 112-141, 126 Stat. 405, Section 1319(b) as it could help to resolve any potential controversy related to the project, and the opportunity to review additional comments submitted after the Final EIS may assist the Joint Lead Agencies in developing additional mitigation commitments that could be included in the ROD.

Comments on the Final EIS are due by January 5, 2015, and should be sent to:

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